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## REPRINTS

### THE SCHOOLS OF INDIANAPOLIS—IV.

BY PROFESSOR A. C. SHORTRIDGE.

*The Law of 1853—First Officers and Appointees; Law of 1861—Its Bad Features; History of the School Bill of 1871—Its Narrow Escape from Defeat; Criticism of Early Philadelphia Schools; Plans for New Schoolhouses and Opposition to; Gradual Advance in the Status of the Schools; Citizens to Whom Honor is Due.*

IN concluding this series of articles relating to the schools of Indianapolis, both public and private, I must say that no attempt has been made to give a complete history of education in this city, but only to give in a general way the earlier and later organizations and growth for the first twenty-five years of their history. I shall here add a few items as they occur to me by way of rounding out these reminiscences.

The law of 1853, the first under the present constitution, provided for the election, by the City Council, of three trustees for the term of one year. This was the law for eight years, ending in 1861. Among the names of men who filled that office at one time or another during this period were Henry P. Coburn, Calvin Fletcher, H. F. West, John B. Dillon, William Sheets, David Beaty, James M. Ray, D. V. Culley, N. B. Taylor, John Love, Caleb B. Smith, Lawrence M. Vance, Cyrus C. Hines and Oscar Kendrick. This law was a fairly good one, quite as good as could have been expected at that time, and judging from the excellent character of the men chosen as trustees it would seem something might have been accomplished if only there had been money to do things with.

At the first meeting of the trustees, Messrs. Coburn, Fletcher and West, in March, 1853, principals of the seven schools were duly appointed. Among the appointees was Miss Charlotte

Hobart, to be principal of the Fourth ward school, in West Market street. Miss Hobart, afterward Mrs. Charlotte Hobart Vawter, is still living near the city, and often pleasingly refers to the pioneer schools of that day.

The law enacted in 1861 to take the place of the first one was fraught with the worst of possibilities. It provided for an election by a popular vote of school trustees, nine in number, one for each ward. They were to be nominated and elected precisely as other city officers. This at once placed the whole school system within the grasp of politicians. The tendency of such a law could not be seen at once; it was not seen in this case. The men chosen to manage the schools were in the main good ones. I call to mind the following, D. V. Culley, James Green, Thomas B. Elliott, James Sulgrove, Lucian Barbour, Alexander Metzger and Herman Lieber, as men who served on the School Board from 1861 to 1865. However, a few years of this method of choosing school officers would have been followed by consequences that all good people would have deplored. One needs but to examine carefully the working of school management in large cities of the country to be convinced that large sums of money are annually wasted, often worse than wasted, because managed by politicians.

In another article I have said that the school bill of 1871, giving us a larger School Board with authority to levy all taxes and establish the public library, passed the State Senate easily enough with the help of our Senators, E. B. Martindale and John Caven. A little incident in which Mr. Caven figured I will relate.

One day I went up to the Senate chamber and said to Mr. Caven: "Well, Senator, how are things going to-day?"

He looked up thoughtfully and said: "Everything is moving sluggishly; the Senators all have their pet measures, and they are struggling to get them before the Senate. I am doing everything I can for Marion county and for Indianapolis, and I hope to get everything through in time, but I can't say when."

I stood for a moment and walked to the outside of the railing to the space usually occupied by the members of the third house.

In a moment there came hurriedly a page and said, "Senator Caven wants to see you."

I returned to his desk and he said: "Shortridge, that bill about which you have lost so much sleep has passed the Senate, been signed by the President, and has already gone to the House."

Of course, I congratulated Mr. Caven and walked to the other end of the Capitol. Here the bill encountered a good many obstacles; many of the members thought that Indianapolis was asking too much. At one time the bill was lost for three days, and it was only after a diligent search, aided by an assistant secretary, that we were able to find it.

Older people will remember that that session of the General Assembly broke up in a row. The Republican members of the House broke the quorum, to prevent what they believed to be mischievous legislation, some of them going to Madison and others to Kentucky and elsewhere. The time for final adjournment came on the Tuesday following, and the Speaker, in formally adjourning the House, had prepared and read an address in which he arraigned in the severest language the Republican members, particularly the Marion county members, for breaking the quorum.

In his address he gave a list of the measures that had failed to pass, and among others mentioned the Indianapolis school bill. After the adjournment Judge Martindale and I asked the Speaker on what ground he made the statement that the school bill had failed. He made no explanation, but said it had failed, and that he would not sign it.

Very soon, probably the same day, the Speaker, with a few friends, started for Cincinnati, where they spent a day or two, and afterward went to Columbus, where the Ohio Legislature was in session. Meantime I was watching the dispatches to know where the party was and when it would return to Indianapolis. They came back to Indianapolis, I think about five o'clock, on the Friday following. A few friends of the school bill anxiously awaited their coming. John R. Elder, in a very persuasive state of mind, met the party at the Bates House immediately after their return.

I went to the Governor's office to say that the Speaker had returned to the city and would probably be up in a few minutes. In fifteen or twenty minutes the Speaker, with Mr. Elder at his side, entered the office and stated to the Governor that he was prepared to put his signature to any bills or resolutions that had been regularly passed, as he must leave for Terre Haute at eleven o'clock that night. The Governor had the documents all close at hand, and one by one the Speaker attached his signature.

The last of the bunch was the Indianapolis school bill. The Speaker picked it up, examined the title, and said: "I think this bill was not regularly passed, and I have stated publicly that I would not sign it, and I don't want to do it."

Now it was Mr. Elder's time to exercise his persuasive tactics, and he did so effectively. Governor Baker then stated that he had examined the bill with a good deal of care and that he believed the citizens generally wanted it, and said further: "Mr. Speaker, if you will sign it I will approve it at once." The Speaker, still holding the bill in his left hand, his pen in the right hand, sat silently for a few moments, laid the bill quietly on the table and wrote, "William Mack, Speaker of the House of Representatives."

This over, having a copy of the bill in my pocket, Mr. Elder and I walked away, congratulating ourselves that on the final roundup something had been done for Indianapolis and her school system.

More than a generation ago I spent two days in the Philadelphia schools. A part of the time was occupied in search of a school system, but the attempt to discover anything that even remotely resembled a system was a failure. There was no head or general management except, as I remember, a merely nominal one, a secretary whose time was spent in his office. Every school was as independent in its organization and instruction, and generally in its text-books, of every other school as Indianapolis is of Fort Wayne or as Detroit, Michigan, is independent of Louisville, Kentucky. The girls' high and normal school, so

far as any attempt was made to do things in a normal way, was a farce—either that or else I could find only the abnormal end of it. All things considered, I can easily say that there were fewer things in the Philadelphia schools that I would wish to carry away with me than I had ever found in any city I had ever visited before; really nothing that would have been in the least degree helpful to Indianapolis was anywhere found. I do not speak of the present Philadelphia schools, but in recent years all of us have learned more as to the way municipal affairs are managed in Philadelphia. It is not a surprise to any one to hear it said that money enough is squandered each year by the school authorities to support amply the public school system in any city of 100,000 people. It should be said that there was to be found a first-rate high school, one of the best that up to that time I had ever seen.

Referring now to the law of 1861, providing for the election of trustees at the general election, it should be stated that there were other reasons than this one for desiring a change in the law. There was a controlling influence in the board, though exerted by a minority of its members, that was an effectual bar to progress. To relieve the schools of a threatened political control which certainly could not have been staved off many years, and to rid them of a policy of doing things only by halves, the monotony of which was only relieved by doing nothing at all, the General Assembly, in 1865, was induced to return to the mode of electing trustees by the City Council. This, to be sure, was not an ideal place to lodge that responsibility, but in the circumstances as they existed it was the best that could be done.

The Council acted promptly, and, as provided by law, chose for a term of three years Messrs. Thomas B. Elliott, Clemens Vonnegut and William H. L. Noble. These men were wise in counsel, prompt in action and courageous in execution. It was at this time that real signs of progress were first apparent.

Among the changes in the law was one section of a general school law containing, I remember, 168 sections, and designed to include all the scrappy laws pertaining to education and to em-

brace many radical improvements. Among them was one raising the tax on all the property of the State from 10 to 16 cents on the \$100 of taxable property, and fully restoring to cities, incorporated towns and townships authority to levy special taxes to construct houses and pay teachers.

About the first thing the newly appointed trustees did after the Council had provided for a reasonable tax levy for the construction of buildings and the payment of salaries of teachers, was to settle on plans for the construction of new schoolhouses. To this end the board visited Dayton and one or two other Ohio cities. I had already seen the better buildings of Chicago and Cincinnati. It was determined that I should go East and examine buildings in the principal cities. In Boston I found what seemed to me to be about what Indianapolis needed. The superintendent sent with me a messenger to several of their latest and best buildings. One of these, the John Hancock school by name, was selected as the model building for which I was in search. After procuring from the office of the school committee the plans of the building decided on, I returned immediately to Indianapolis. These plans were examined and approved by the school trustees and at once placed in the hands of an architect, Joseph Curzon, with instructions to prepare plans and specifications for the construction of two new buildings. Following this, schools Nos. 4 and 9 were constructed as speedily as possible. The original cost was estimated at \$32,000, but in view of certain changes and additions the cost of each of the buildings was a few thousand dollars more. The plan of these two houses, as I am told, has been followed in a general way in the construction of houses ever since, and they have been followed in the erection of houses in a number of other cities of the State.

When it became known that the schoolhouses costing \$30,000 to \$40,000 were to be built and that it would take many of them to meet the city's needs, there came to the surface a good deal of opposition by some of the heavier taxpayers, particularly from those who had no children to educate or who preferred to educate their children in private schools. In the face of this opposition the school trustees, in view of the rapidly increasing school popu-

lation and of the approval of a large majority of citizens, went steadily forward in the work of providing more abundantly for the comfort and convenience of this growing demand.

At the end of three years, the time for which this School Board was chosen, the City Council elected a new board, re-electing William H. L. Noble and replacing Messrs. Elliott and Vonnegut with James C. Yohn and John R. Elder. The new board pursued precisely the policy laid down by its predecessor. Meantime, money came more abundantly into the treasury, and more and better accommodations were provided, and salaries of teachers from time to time were advanced. So that by the end of this second term of three years the school property of the city had advanced at least 300 or 400 per cent. And the moneys paid for the instruction of the schools was also considerably increased.

I remember that in 1863 the teachers of the lowest primary grades—who, by the way, had two classes of children each day, one in the morning and a different class in the afternoon—were receiving only \$25 a month, and at the end of six years these same teachers were receiving \$62.50 a month. Other salaries were materially increased, but not in the same proportions. The men who were charged with the duty of organizing and getting under way the schools in earlier days were among the best that could have been selected for the purpose, and would have accomplished all that could reasonably have been expected of them if only there had been something to work with, but practically there was nothing, so that the real pioneer work of laying broadly the foundation was left to the five men who were intrusted with this duty between the years 1865 and 1871. When, therefore, a more accurate and minute history of the Indianapolis schools shall be written, a long chapter must be devoted to the self-sacrificing labors of Thomas B. Elliott, Clemens Vonnegut, William H. L. Noble, James C. Yohn and John R. Elder.

[End of Series.]